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Supporting Innovation in Construction Products

By John Flack

This article briefly reviews the evaluation process followed by NRC-IRC's Canadian Construction Materials Centre and indicates how designers and builders can use the information resulting from the evaluation of a particular product.

Cet article discute du service national du Centre canadien de matériaux de construction de l'IRC-CNRC sur l'évaluation de matériaux, de produits et de systèmes de construction innovateurs, et explique comment les concepteurs et les constructeurs peuvent utiliser les informations provenant d'une évaluation.

The NRC Institute for Research in Construction (NRC-IRC) supports innovation in construction not only through research but also through the product evaluation service it provides through its Canadian Construction Materials Centre (CCMC).

A CCMC evaluation is an impartial, technical opinion on the compliance of the product or system with the objectives, functional statements and minimum level of performance required by the National Building Code of Canada (NBC) 2005, or with the requirements of a provincial code. The final decision on the acceptability of the product and its code compliance, however, rests with the regulatory authority involved.

CCMC evaluation officers, when they receive a request to evaluate a novel product, first determine whether the request is within their mandate. Products that are covered by other programs are re-directed to the appropriate agency. For requests applicable to CCMC, the initial step is the production of a scope and evaluation plan (SEP). This document outlines the scope of the evaluation, determines the applicable NBC requirements and provides input obtained from the provincial authority having jurisdiction. The next step is to develop a Technical Guide based on the SEP. The guide is written with technical input from experts from within NRC, academia and elsewhere. CCMC then directs the manufacturer or distributor to a third-party Standards Council of Canada (SCC) accredited laboratory of their choice to perform the testing specified in the guide.

CCMC evaluation officers analyze the test results and, if the evaluation is positive, CCMC issues its technical opinion on the product's compliance with the NBC in the form of an Evaluation Report. The Evaluation Report also contains other key information, including product description, technical data on which the opinion is based, and any conditions or limitations associated with the evaluation.

Evaluations are undertaken for products manufactured, assembled, or processed at a particular site or manufacturing facility and they apply only to those products. The opinion rendered is limited to the question of the product's compliance with minimum code requirements. The reports do not address consumer issues such as warranties or colour.

CCMC does not rank or compare products, i.e., it does not say product A is better than product B. Furthermore, CCMC does not act as a consumer advocate or watchdog for new products generally.

Evaluation Reports can be found on the CCMC Web site in the *Registry of Product Evaluations*. The Web version is the official version of the Registry, is updated quarterly, and can be viewed free of charge at <http://irc.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/ccmc>.

The 2007 edition of the Registry is also available free of charge on CD-ROM. It can be ordered from the NRC Virtual Store at www.nrc.gc.ca/virtualstore or by contacting NRC-IRC Publication Sales at 1-800-672-7990. Print versions are no longer available.

The Registry contains information on over 500 products, from foundation piles to engineered wood, from air barriers to insulation and doors and windows. Users can search the Registry by manufacturer or product name, MasterFormat number, report number, CCMC reference number, or keyword. In addition, the CCMC Web site has a feature that allows users to contact a manufacturer directly.

Each CCMC evaluation report is assigned a number, which report holders may use on their product, packaging or product documentation to show that the product has been evaluated by CCMC. CCMC has two types of report. Those pertaining to innovative products have the letter R after the report number. In these reports CCMC expresses an opinion on code compliance, as explained above. The other type of report has the letter L after the number and denotes compliance of a product with a recognized standard. Compliance with a standard does not mean compliance with the NBC. Even if a supplier shows that a product has a CCMC report number, it does not guarantee that the evaluation for the product is still valid or in effect. Users should check the Registry and make sure the product and its evaluation report are still included. If it is not, it is advisable to contact CCMC and ask about it.

Proponents whose products and systems have been evaluated by CCMC and who wish to obtain evaluations in other countries can obtain technical help from CCMC for this purpose. Being a founding member of World Federation of Technical Assessment Organizations, CCMC can utilize its network of assessment organizations to provide guidance and assistance.

For more information about CCMC, please contact John Flack: john.flack@nrc-cnrc.gc.ca

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